

ceremony! What will happen to me!' He tries very hard to feel remorse. But he is not able to. Instead, he feels a lot lighter.

At one time he made his wax figures lightheartedly, in a playful spirit. They were light and easy in gesture. But later, at an unlucky moment, he got this desire to make timeless creations. So, now, they tended to be overloaded with meaning. In his effort to make timeless creations he was losing his old gift. He suddenly remembers that he has not touched that immortal vessel of Visvakarma¹⁶ for a long time. So he puts his hand out over the table. But it wasn't there! So, he had lost everything. The roar of the all-destroying flow now sounds clear. Why does he not feel any sense of disappointment even after such a loss! He still has a compelling desire to create things. But just to create something. He has no desire for timeless creation and immortal fame anymore. He just wants to keep his fingers busy to the beat of an inner delight. He wants nothing more.

He has used up all his wax. Finding a sheet of paper within his hand's reach he feels around it and gives it a twist. As a result, the ordinary paper takes on an extraordinary form. Kattamashai is overcome with amazement. He pulls out another sheet of paper and folds and twists it here and there at various angles. And quite unexpected, unimaginably new forms emerge. This gives him limitless pleasure, the same kind of pleasure that he once got out of making wax figures, though, in another sense, they were different.

Slowly Kattamashai recognizes that from his effort to make timeless creations he has learned many things and his folded papers were suffused with this knowledge.

Kattamashai has forgotten the question of timeless creation. He sees in both his folded paper and modelled wax figures a kind of gathering and dispersal like he noticed one day in the all-destroying flow, or experienced from that vessel Fate had left with him. So however diverse his work was externally and internally, it was integral at the core.

When, thus, Kattamashai had lost track of everything else in his involvement with folding paper, Fate came and stood before him.

'Katta, is your timeless creation over? You had resolved not to leave your seat till you had finished that. And I waited for you. But now that the work is over get ready to go.'

'I know I have to go. But I have only just started experiencing that creative delight. Can't I have a little more time?'

You are asking for the impossible. There is no end to this delight in making and unmaking. It has no ultimate shrine you can journey to and reach. This delight is coeval with your experience. Your work won't finish even if you are granted eternal life!

'Timeless creation, immortal fame all that was not for me. I have washed my hands off them.' Then he tells Fate the whole story.

After hearing it all, Fate says, 'What is the use of crying over spilt milk? And I don't see that vase of yours either!'

'I am certain it was stolen by that parrot of the Goddess of Learning.'

'Why would the parrot steal it?'

'It is a longstanding habit of the devotees of this Goddess.'

'Tell me, now, what is all this that you are doing?'

Kattamashai pushes a few of these pieces towards Fate and says, 'See for yourself.'

Fate: 'I am no connoisseur. But your things look good. So did the wax figures. Kattamashai, how do you manage to do all this wearing your dark glasses ?'

Kattamashai: 'I do them in the kind of light there is in my world.'

'Oh you talk like one of those supermen—only they talk about their own light.'

'No, no, I am certainly no superman. Mine is a very ordinary light. It lasts only as long as I model my figures or fold my papers. As soon as my work finishes it is all darkness again.'

You don't say? Kattamashai, these are the hallmarks of timeless creation!'

'I have told you that I have bid goodbye to all that long ago.'

'Anyway, you will certainly leave behind lasting work but your name won't last.'

'My name won't last? Then what will?'

'Why, these things. A lot of people will appreciate them, enjoy them, recall them with wonder, even study their creator, but they won't find his name.'

Kattamashai asks again, 'You mean all these fruits of my endeavour will stay, but my name alone won't? Who made this crooked law?'

'You had yourself disowned any interest in name. You wanted neither fame nor influence. You just wanted to make timeless creations. So, you should be happy.'

'It is true that the question of name never occurred to me as long as I was making things. But the thought of anonymity distresses me. At this point in time creative ecstasy alone is not enough. If people will forget my name what will remain of me?'

'Your old ailment is not cured yet. Taking a beating on both sides from your twin identities Rudranarayan and Kattamashai, you have been moaning too long.'

'I don't moan any more. If my entire name is wiped out what will remain? What will I be then?'

'I can't answer your question. Amongst God's creations you cannot understand one thing on the example of another. Such questions have to be figured out by each one for himself. You do not seem to have thought about all this.'

'Where have I had the time? My whole life has passed in making all these things.'

'Your figures have no names. How will people recognize them? They don't resemble God's creations. They don't resemble the lumps of wax or sheets of paper you made them with. Neither are they just paper or lumps of wax. Still, you cannot deny their existence. If this is so for them, why are you worried for yourself?'

'How do you say that they are nameless? All these are distinct from other things because of a name. If all names are wiped out there will be no rationale for creation. Then everything will be uniform. Maybe there are certain supreme laws or maybe there aren't. But I work with name and form. Where everything is uniform I get nervous.'

'But your creations are a composite of the lawful and the lawless. They have attained to timelessness on the borders of uniformity'

'Well, experience is my forte, not cerebration. What I know by my intellect does not stay long in my mind. I have long tried to realize with my hands what is timeless in the world of forms.'

Fate: 'So be it. You stick to your path. Your creativity will show you the way. I give you your freedom.'

Kattamashai: 'Then won't I see you again? I shall be terribly lone-

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Fate: 'It is that very loneliness that will introduce you to timeless forms of creativity. But its laws are more pitiless than mine. Nobody can escape them.'

Kattamashai: 'But before I come face with these I hope I can see you once again.'

Fate: 'But why? Don't you see that at all times my shadow falls across your dark glasses?'

PART III

The big date numbers of the calendar slide backwards into the dust-laden past. Kattamashai moves forward on the zig-zag path of life. He encounters surprise after surprise. His mind perks up when work, creativity and delight commingle. He no more thinks of leaving behind any lasting relic. He has forgotten the sky studded with the sun, moon and stars. He has forgotten the colours of the rainbow. In front of him is the limitless moment with a few lean rays of light playing upon it. With the help of which light he has been creative so far.

Going ahead like this the path suddenly trembles to a halt. He can't go any further. In front of him lies the ribbed, worn-out, barren present. Kattamashai feels perplexed at this unexpected turn.

He knows no way of making this barrenness productive. But he is not ready to abandon hope even in the face of this hopelessness. He sits down to work with the firm resolve that he will animate this stagnation with his power of creativity.

The amazing facility of his ten fingers comes into play, the depth of his knowledge spouts forth, but he is unable to bring back the old live-

liness. There is the wish and the resolution, but not the old steadfastness. The past keeps his creativity leashed. Like a delirious person Kattamashai asks in the darkness, 'Is this the ultimate achievement of a life? Is this the final reward of all that self-denying endeavour?' Oscillating between faith and despair, his body, mind and intellect seem to clot up and atrophy. Within his head it seems as if his intellect is being hammered into rubble. He suffers from an unnatural thirst; he has forgotten all about life, death and immortality. A cry for a drop of water captures his whole being. It echoes through earth and tree, bird and beast, hill and mountain, the lower and the upper worlds. It is one with the cry of his ego. For what is he thirsty? When will this end? Kattamashai's composure is shattered.

While in this state he hears a soft ringing voice. Someone tells him, 'Take this water and slake your thirst.'

Emptying the water in one draught he asks, 'Who are you?' The unseen voice says with a laugh, 'I am Hladini,¹⁷ the spirit of Joy. I have brought water to quench your thirst. But I see you are still thirsty. You are gone in years but you have still not learnt how to drink water. Here drink another pitcher of water. Drink slowly. That will quench your thirst.' Drinking this water Kattamashai feels refreshed.

He asks her: 'Hladini, where do you come from? Why did you not come earlier?'

Hladini says: 'I have passed through your room many times noiselessly; but I never found you so thirsty. Seeing your suffering today I have come with this pitcher of water. Is your thirst satisfied? Here, drink a little more water.'

Kattamashai holds the pitcher in his hands. Hladini pours the water in. It sounds like a distant waterfall. The water that spills over runs down his hands. Kattamashai empties the whole pitcher and says, 'Your water is very sweet. I have never drunk such cool and earth-flavoured water. I am satisfied. I am no longer thirsty.'

Hladini goes away with a floral peal of laughter.

In the light of that laughter Kattamashai sees a miraculous sight. Numberless paths marked with his footprints run in various directions. On them romps his childhood. His heart is clear and limpid. In

the distance, on the arid earth, stands a palm tree crowned with dark green leaves. In its lean shadow he sees a couple with bouquets in their hands. The path runs over a wide field latticed with sun and shadow. At the end of the path Kattamashai sees, with astonished eyes that blue canopy stretched from horizon to horizon. And under it Rudranarayan, sitting still as if painted in a picture.

The light of the laughter grows dim. The white peak of delight gets covered with mist. A black dragon,¹⁸ with a long slimy body pounces on Kattamashai. The dragon fumes and growls, 'Open up your treasure of form and beauty; bring out all your age old collections!'

Kattamashai asks in a distressed voice, 'Who are you? Why do you want to waylay me? My treasure of form and beauty is within my work. What I have left with me are only a few crusty pots, with a coat of tasteless sap. What will you gain by depriving me of these? Who are you?'

Dragon: 'What use is it to you to keep this heap of worn-out pots together?'

Kattamashai: 'If I throw away these collections of the years, I will become a helpless destitute.'

Dragon: 'Instead of holding on to this junk like a beggar, why can't you acquire new vessels, new beauty, and new life-sap?'

Kattamashai: "Where shall I find new life-sap and new beauty? Where shall I find new vessels for them?"

Dragon: 'Well it is time for me to leave. I leave with you your stack of words.'

Then taking his all, and leaving him destitute, the Dragon disappears.

A drum beats in Kattamashai's heart. Then on his frayed and worn-out stack of words he floats away into a formless, colourless, limitless void.

Notes

1. Kattamashai (in Sanskritized form—Kartamahāsaya) means 'master of the household'.

2. *Chnndratapa* is the Bengali for canopy; it has various associational undertones which 'canopy' does not perhaps have.
3. His first name before he came to be called Benodebehari.
4. *Mrityuban* ('arrow of death') and *Phulban* ('arrow of flowers') have their own undertones of meaning in Bengali literary usage.
5. An ascetic of the Indian Puranas who gave up his life so that his ribs might be used by the gods to make weapons to fight the asuras.
6. In Bengali, it is a well-known phrase relating to the Bhadra month.
7. *Menaka* is one of the dancing girls in the court of the Hindu god *Indra* who is generally sent to distract the penance human aspirants do for godly powers; in short, a temptress.
8. The word *kaka-jyotsna* used in the Bengali version does not have an English equivalent. The original word naturally has certain undertones of meaning which are untranslatable.
9. *Pandas* are traditional priest-guides in the major centres of pilgrimage in India. They also are genealogists of a kind.
10. *Thakur* being the suffix to denote respect.
11. This is the nearest equivalent to a known Bengali expression used in the original.
12. The Holy Trinity of the Hindu pantheon.
13. The word in the Bengali original is *niyati*, a closer equivalent to which will be 'destiny'.
14. *Chitragupta* in Indian mythology is the officer in the court of the God of Death who keeps the record of the dead and dispenses justice to their souls in accordance with their deeds.
15. The word *kirtinasa*, almost untranslatable in its full implication, is something that annihilates ego and individual achievement.
16. *Visvakarma* is the God of Skills and Industry.
17. *Hladini* is sensual pleasure deified as a goddess in the Tantric pantheon.
18. The image of the Dragon is drawn from Chinese symbolism.

A glass dropping from our hand to the hard floor will doubtless break instantly into small pieces. But it will not upset us to see this; we will sweep up and throw the pieces away without a second thought. But if it stops short with just a crack that will make us uneasy for we cannot put it to use nor can we discard it as rubbish.

When I met Kirtikar his condition was similar to that of this cracked glass. May be the comparison is not too apt; for one, he was a human being, not something made of glass; and what he nursed was more in the nature of a twisted muscle than a crack. How he came to this he never explained in words; but his look and gestures told their own indirect story.

Nothing earth-shattering, though. When Kirtikar turned twenty-seven, passing many twists and turns in life, he suddenly stubbed his foot. Not on a tree or rock or doorstep, which would not have deserved mention, but on a flashy painted doll.

An enchanting doll fashioned by God Himself. It was not that he had not come across such a thing before. In fact he himself did not know how he came into this predicament. And if he had, it could not have been called a predicament.

With her picturesque build and matchless gait this painted doll sailed before his eyes, her flawless hulk flashing its colours around. Then she disappeared, leaving behind this flash of colour in his eye; and a battered ego.

I could see that Kirtikar was trying hard to hammer his battered life back into shape. I could still see the flash in his eyes. Though I never mentioned it. So he still liked my company. His kind want friends and company but not real intimacy. He let you sit near him but if your body touched his, it irritated him no end and frayed his temper.

When he himself brought the matter up Kirtikar dressed the whole thing with a veil of words. I knew what he wanted to say and his verbal incontinence came out of his inability to do so. In such cases people love to talk but do not have the patience to listen. There was no head or tail to what Kirtikar said. And he said the same thing over and over, under various pretexts, in the guise of a fable or story or fairytale.

His style of telling the story was unforgettable. When we do so we generally put ourselves at ease and rock in our chair. But Kirtikar did the opposite. As his need to communicate mounted he pushed himself forward in his easy chair, till he sat on its frame. Then he stooped his shoulders, stared at the floor and made catching gestures with the fingers of one hand on the palm of the other. It was as if he was trying to pluck his own words out.

All the stories that Kirtikar told me have gone up into thin air like cigarette smoke. I may have at that time been taken in, a little, by his voice and state of mind; but now most of it has lost colour. Though I still remember one story that his fantastic imagination had cooked up. And it somewhat symbolized his own life story.

I cannot now recall clearly how he told the story; so in recounting it below I am mixing my words with his:

A long time ago there was a small village in the midst of Rajasthan's desert.'

'Why do you have to take your village that far,' I interrupted Kirtikar, 'You could have set it up somewhere nearer.'

'No,' he asserted, 'in a story like this it is good to know the real geographical location.'

'Where the village ended there was an enormous tree. No one had ever seen such a tree in that area; for both its form and grace it was remarkable. But in spite of all that form and grace and beauty the tree did not have any peace of mind.'

'It wanted to grow bigger and bigger. And it did so too. Everything should have its limits. But this tree's ambition was limitless. It wanted to make a hole in the sky and go beyond the clouds. And wrapped up in this thought it forgot its tie with the earth.

'This was quite natural; through its branches and leaves the earth was hardly visible. It was so far away; its head was up there and the earth was down below. During the day it kept calm and did not feel depressed; it seemed then that its head had hit the sky. But in the dark night it was not so sure; the dark sky seemed so far and the stars seemed further still.

'What tree was that?' I asked Kirtikar. 'It had no name,' he said which made me exclaim, 'A tree without a name!'

Kirtikar put his foot with the Marathi chappal forward and leaning back a little said, 'Why not? Don't you know the tenets of abstract art?' I knew. So I asked him further, 'What happened to the tree?'

Kirtikar resumed the story.

'Days passed. In the meantime weevils were attacking the tree's roots, which it had forgotten all about in its effort to become taller and taller.

'And one day, hit by a small squall, it doubled up and came down with a crash on the earth.

'Just where it stood.

'The tree had had no use so far but when it fell people rushed to it from all sides. It was auctioned. Soon came the axe, saw and chisel. Cutting it into pieces people took away, some on their shoulders, some loaded in bullock-carts, this useless tree's now useful body. The place the tree stood fell empty in no time. By slow degrees the loose wet earth of its base also dried up and hardened. There was no trace of the tree.

'More time passed. One day when an old man was passing by with his grandson. The grandson asked him, "Where did that tree stand?" The old man put his finger out and said, "Out there." "There is nothing there," the grandson remarked but the old man continued to repeat, "Out there o-o-out there! It had grown so tall with its head as high as the sky."

'Do you get the message?' Kirtikar queried, 'All these things around us are meaningless and do not last. The only thing that lasts is the barren space.'

True, years have passed since Kirtikar told the story. And I forgot to mention, he too is no more; one day he was wrapped in sheet and blanket, padded with pillows and put on the funeral pyre.

So he is not there. Maybe that is why I remember him and, between my daily chores, that remarkable story he had made up.

A lump of hard wax softens in the hand's warmth or the sun's heat. It changes its shape and character under the pressure of the fingers. It can now be stretched, or cut with a knife. And modelled with ease into any shape one wants.

Handled this way a form comes out of it one day. Even if we cannot make out whether it is a man's or a monkey's we can see for sure it is different from the natural lump.

With further handling a human form emerges. We cannot make out whether it is male or female, but it is human for sure. Even if it does not look like actual human beings it has an unmistakable identity which sets it apart from other lumps of wax.

If subjected to more heat this wax figure will revert back into a lump. And from this lump more shapes and forms can emerge if we so wish. It is this urge to transform a material that gives rise to art.¹

In all materials—clay, wood, stone, metal or plastic—many shapes and forms lie latent. An artist can draw these out of each if he understands its nature. A scientist may identify the physical elements of each material and inform us how hard the tools to carve wood or stone should be and at what temperature clay fires hard. But these latencies he passes over.

Oil lamp, oil, match sticks—all these may be there together, but still there may be no light. Only when one strikes a match and lights

the lamp is there light, or heat. But this match-stick cannot light an electric bulb. For that you have to press a switch. Likewise, the light of an electric torch cannot set an oil lamp aflame.

It is those who set aflame a whole world of forms by touching natural materials with their inner fire whom we call artists. The torchlight of the intellect can help others to see them but it cannot create the works themselves.

Artist's creations are not eternal. A lot of them disintegrate and turn to dust. Some lie below the earth and surface after centuries. Some of these works of the past illuminate our present. Others do not have that power and remain mere relics.

We have seen, within our own lives, how great an influence scientific discoveries have had on the growth and evolution of civilization. Compared to these contributions of science the contributions of art seem to be of doubtful value. For an artist does not overtly solve any of the society's problems. All the same, the fact that no society has completely abandoned art is proof enough that it still has its uses.

For a human being his heart is as essential as his intellect. If this tiny organ is pierced by even a needle nothing remains of the man. Art, music, literature—these function together as a society's heart. If they are destroyed the human element in society will disappear. And the lives of its people will become unfeeling and mechanical.

But it is hardly possible for art to grow in complete isolation from science and technology. It is worth pointing out here that the distance between art and science we notice in the present day is the result of unnatural social circumstances.

Any child who plays with a saw can find out which edge of it is right and which wrong. Likewise, everyone can learn to speak, or use a knife or scissors, or move his limbs. It just takes a little time and some assistance from others.

Such assistance is not quite so essential in the case of art as in the case of science. For art and literature are personalized creations. Though we cannot say that there is no place for traditional learning in art.² The ways to carve a hard material, or lay colour on the surface of a wall or paper or mud-plaster, are learnt from tradition. But when an art language becomes complex, tradition gains in importance and diverts its creative power into scientific analysis and experiment. This

spells death for art. For an artist creates not by scientific analysis and experiment but the strength of his heart's emotions, with the help of diverse accessories.

This is just to point how different the rationale of art is from the rationale of science. It is futile to compare art and factual truth. Art's rationale comes home readily to any viewer who experiences the real essence of a work of art.

An artist's path is lit by his sensations—of sight, taste, touch, smell and sound; without these there is no art.

But even if these sensations are the primary ingredients of art, art finds fulfilment only when they are transformed into ineffable abstractions. We may say that art holds together the extremes of the visible and the invisible, the objective and the abstract by a kind of magnetic power. The objective part of art that we see, hear or touch is subject to language and technique. But that part that leads it to abstraction comes from the fire of the artist's heart. Its electric power transmutes the sensory reality—of form, taste or smell—and presents them in a new light.

You can train people in language and technique, not emotion and impulse. These are inborn faculties. They are more intense in some, less so in others. Any attempt to restrain these individual powers in the name of tradition, or any social norm, is a kind of barbarism. Dissent grows in the face of such barbarism and the fresh experiences of a handful of individuals herald a new age. As has happened in our time.

Language—whether of literature, art, music or dance—is changeable; it never remains the same. These changes come in the wake of a new aesthetic vision.

But despite this changeability certain basic features persist.

For instance, music is based on sound and cannot be conceived without it. Sound may be an element in literature, but its main goal is meaning; good poetry consists of a close harmony of sound and meaning.

The basis of visual arts—architecture, sculpture, painting—is shape. They cannot express Sound. A poet can describe the colours of a flower; but to express the sensation of colour and its excitement is beyond his literary skills. But an artist can do this easily with a few dabs of paint.